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Chairman: Ms. Londoño (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Colombia)

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In the absence of the Chairman, Ms. Londoño (Colombia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Agenda item 106: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*)

Draft resolution A/C.3/58/L.2 and L.12: Preparations for the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004

1. **Ms. Elisha** (Benin) introduced the amendments contained in document A/C.3/58/L.12, which had been made to the proposed text transmitted by the Economic and Social Council in document A/C.3/58/L.2. Progress made in the negotiations on the amendments to the text proposed by the Council had led to a number of changes. Paragraphs 1 and 2 should read: "*Welcomes* the decision of Benin to host a regional preparatory conference in Benin in May 2004 in collaboration with the United Nations within the existing resources", and "*Welcomes* decisions by members of the international community (Governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society) to host events in observance of the International Year of the Family;".

2. The following paragraph should be inserted after paragraph 5: "*Calls on* the United Nations system, agencies and bodies, including the regional commissions, within existing resources, and invites intergovernmental organizations and research and academic institutions, to support regional events of the year 2004 to contribute to the success of these events;". Paragraph 3 should be replaced by the following: "*Welcomes* the launching by the Secretary-General of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family on 4 December 2003;".

3. In addition to her own delegation, Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belize, Bhutan, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, China, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Malawi, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Panama, Russian Federation, Senegal, Timor-Leste and Tunisia had become sponsors of the draft resolution.

4. **The Chairman** said that Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Swaziland and Yemen had also joined the sponsors.

Agenda item 108: Crime prevention and criminal justice (*continued*) (A/C.3/58/L.13 and L.14)

Draft resolution A/C.3/58/L.14: Strengthening the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme, in particular its technical cooperation capacity

5. **Mr. Zelioli** (Italy) said that draft resolution A/C.3/58/L.14 highlighted some of the major developments in crime prevention and criminal justice, including the entry into force of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the forthcoming entry into force of its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the successful outcome of the negotiations on the Convention against Corruption. It also recognized the importance of existing efforts that complemented the work of the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme, and stressed that technical cooperation capability was another important component of action to combat transnational crime.

6. Some amendments had been proposed to the text of the draft resolution. After the fifth preambular paragraph, the following paragraph should be added: "*Recalling further* Economic and Social Council resolution 2003/28 of 22 July 2003 on international cooperation in the prevention, combating and elimination of kidnapping and in providing assistance to victims,". In the fourteenth preambular paragraph, the words "*Recalling also*" should be replaced by "*Welcoming* the adoption of".

7. Turning to the operative portion of the draft, he said that in the fourth line of paragraph 9, the word "voluntary" should be inserted before "contributions". The phrase "and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air" should be deleted from paragraph 17. In paragraph 18, "Protocols" should appear in the plural. Finally, in the penultimate line of paragraph 19, the word "States" should be inserted before "parties".

8. He also announced that Australia, Belgium, China, Colombia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Monaco, the

Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Thailand, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and Venezuela had joined the sponsors.

9. **The Chairman** said that Argentina, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Guatemala, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Serbia and Montenegro, Turkey and Zambia also wished to join the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/58/L.14.

Draft resolution A/C.3/58/L.13: United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders

10. **Mr. Nyamulinda** (Rwanda), while noting that the draft resolution contained in A/C.3/58/L.13 was similar to the draft proposals from previous years, drew attention to paragraph 10, which requested a report of the Secretary-General for consideration at the fifty-ninth session.

Agenda item 109: International drug control (*continued*) (A/C.3/58/L.15)

Draft resolution A/C.3/58/L.15: International cooperation against the world drug problem

11. **Mr. Simancas** (Mexico) said that the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/58/L.15 had been joined by Algeria, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Japan, Liechtenstein, Myanmar, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland and Ukraine. The draft text before the Committee reflected further efforts to simplify and rationalize the text.

12. **The Chairman** said that Andorra, Belarus, Chile, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Senegal, Singapore, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Viet Nam and Zambia had also joined the sponsors.

Agenda item 113: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/58/272, 282, 328, 329 and 420)

13. **Mr. Motoc** (Romania) said that meaningful implementation of the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children required the adoption and execution of a comprehensive set of policies aimed at addressing the basic needs of children and ensuring the respect of their rights.

14. After the end of the Communist regime, Romanians had become increasingly aware of the dramatic situation of thousands of institutionalized children, victims of an outdated protection system that was unable to provide them with decent living conditions. Since then, Romania had taken important steps to reform the childcare system and bring it up to international standards. In 2001 it had adopted a comprehensive strategy designed to change the system from institution-based to family-based care, inspired by the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols, all of which Romania had ratified. The focus of the reform was the closure of institutions and the development of alternative solutions together with services to help families in need. Where reintegration with the natural family was not possible, emphasis was placed on foster care and national adoption; inter-country adoption was considered a last resort. As a result of the reform process, 105 of the former child institutions had been closed.

15. The recently established National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption played a central role on issues relating to children in difficulty, while civil society had made a substantial contribution to the policy and to implementation of the reform. Lastly, new legislation was being introduced which was in keeping with the provisions of the treaties and conventions ratified by Romania in the field of child protection, particularly with regard to adoptions.

16. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that Bangladesh had been one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols. In adapting its international commitments to the national level, Bangladesh had adopted a plan of action for children and established a national council to oversee its implementation. Education, nutrition and the protection of children against disease were priorities of the plan.

17. Education received the largest allocation in the national budget, with special emphasis on the girl child. Primary education had been made compulsory and free for girls up to twelfth grade and that had led to parity in the enrolment of boys and girls.

18. Progress had also been made in reducing child mortality and malnutrition through the extended

immunization programme. Likewise, iodine-deficiency disorders had been reduced, and oral rehydration therapy and vitamin A supplementation had saved the lives of millions of children. Special programmes had also been established for children with disabilities and for abandoned and street children, while there had been significant progress in phasing out child labour from the garment industry with the support of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

19. The elimination of trafficking in persons had been accorded particular priority in Bangladesh. Stringent new legislation had been enacted aimed at protecting women and children, in particular girls, from trafficking and all forms of violence and discrimination. At the regional level, Bangladesh was a party to the Kathmandu Understanding on children and, together with the other members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), was determined to combat that scourge in earnest.

20. Bangladesh was, however, aware that legal reforms and legislation alone were not sufficient; they had to be implemented and followed up. Above all, it was necessary to provide children with a social environment in which values of pluralism, democracy, human rights, family tradition and ethics prevailed.

21. At the international level, one area of specific concern was the situation of children affected by armed conflict and occupation; that of children in Palestine was a case in point. The international community, including the United Nations, should endeavour to strengthen international action on children in armed conflict.

22. **Mr. Alenezi** (Kuwait) said that his delegation was concerned at the instances of cruelty and inhuman treatment of children mentioned in the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (A/58/328). An improvement in the situation would only come about if the rights of children were recognized as an essential aspect of human rights.

23. His country had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in October 1991 and 1 October each year was now celebrated as Arab Children's Day. Evidence of the importance attached by his country to the well-being of young people was given in the report for the current year by the United Nations Development Fund which named Kuwait as one of the foremost countries in terms of human development.

24. Children in Kuwait constituted over half the population and the country had established many programmes and educational and health services for children as well as implementing pilot projects in the field of childhood. The Supreme Council for Children and the Family had been established by decision of the Council of Ministers and was composed of governmental and private bodies involved with children. It was now responsible for preparing his country's national report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and was also studying the possibility of accession by Kuwait to the two Protocols to the Convention.

25. Despite the increase since November 2002 in the number of members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, there was still a delay in the consideration of the national reports relating to the Convention and, since reports would in future be submitted in connection with the Protocols, the work of that Committee would be still further delayed. His delegation was in favour of urging the Committee on the Rights of the Child to make proposals on ways in which its work might be expedited.

26. Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been ratified by a large number of States, children in many regions of the world were still living in situations of socio-economic deprivation and continued to be the victims of armed conflict, sexual exploitation, poverty and AIDS. It was therefore necessary for the members of the international community to make every effort to apply both the letter and the spirit of the various conventions relating to children and to safeguard the future of children and thus the future of mankind.

27. **Ms. Sonaike** (Nigeria) said that Nigeria had made a conscious effort to address the many challenges posed by practices such as the commercial sexual exploitation of children and the impact on children of poverty, disease and armed conflict. It had signed the optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in September 2000, and the Convention itself had been translated into three of the major Nigerian languages to ensure a wider dissemination of its message. To demonstrate its commitment to the promotion of the rights of the child, the National Assembly had recently enacted a bill on children's

rights. Moreover, specific agencies had been established to implement and monitor the Convention and events had been organized to raise awareness about its provisions.

28. Recognizing the importance of education in the reduction of poverty, the Government had relaunched a programme to ensure that every Nigerian child over five years of age had access to free and compulsory education up to junior secondary level. The programme also addressed the issues of retention and quality of education.

29. Deeply concerned about the increasing incidence of child trafficking, the Government was addressing the issue and had enacted legislation on trafficking in persons. The act in question facilitated a rapid exchange of information about offences and prescribed punishments for serious offences such as forced labour and other forms of child abuse. The agency established to enforce the act would coordinate the rehabilitation of trafficked children and participate in the respective proceedings.

30. The HIV/AIDS pandemic continued to have a devastating impact on the lives of children in Nigeria and the Government was combating it on all fronts.

31. Nigeria was also deeply concerned at the armed conflicts of recent years, particularly in the subregion, and the fact that children had been targets of the violence. Children in armed conflict should be afforded comprehensive protection.

32. Despite the measures put in place to promote and protect the rights of Nigerian children, the Government was faced with the problem of the economic recession. The growing inequality resulting from globalization and the servicing of the country's external debt put a strain on families and eroded the traditional extended family mechanisms for providing mutual support and checking abuse. It was necessary to address the issue of developing countries' debt burden. The international community could not continue to ignore the problem of the limited financial resources available to developing countries for development.

33. **Ms. Otiti** (Uganda) said that her delegation wished to thank UNICEF for its tireless efforts to publicize and help end the plight of young boys and girls in northern Uganda, who were being abducted by the so-called Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a terrorist group that, since 1988, had enslaved children as soldiers and human shields to strengthen its ranks. It called on the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to extend his engagement beyond the advocacy, initiatives and monitoring action mentioned in his report (A/58/328) and invited him to visit northern Uganda and to join the efforts to end the reign of terror of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA); it assured him that there were no obstacles to such a visit.

34. The Lord's Resistance Army were rounding up and shooting civilians in the northern part of the country; many people were also being abducted, while camps for internally displaced persons had been attacked. The Government was determined to put an end to that brutality and return the country to normality.

35. Many children had been adversely affected by HIV/AIDS; as a result of the death of one or both parents, many had been forced to assume parental roles for which they were not equipped. Uganda was therefore developing a policy to care for orphans and vulnerable children. Free universal primary education had helped to offset the disadvantages faced by orphans. HIV/AIDS education had been included in the primary school curriculum since 1996 and, to date, 15,000 primary school teachers had been trained to teach life skills based on HIV/AIDS education under the school health project. Non-governmental organizations complemented the activities of the Ministry of Education; their role included advocacy, capacity-building, and encouraging coordination and information-sharing. Nevertheless, the management of cases of paediatric AIDS caused by mother-to-child transmission remained a challenge. The Government was adopting a preventive strategy focusing on voluntary counselling and testing, clinical management, drug therapy, paediatric care and community education.

36. A recent mass measles immunization exercise had concluded with 90 per cent success in most districts, compared to approximately 30 per cent in 1998. It had been supported by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and had targeted 12.8 million children below 15 years of age.

37. The Government of Uganda welcomed the support of the international community to help it protect Uganda's children and ensure that they would all be able to enjoy their rights.

38. **Mr. Gasperoni** (San Marino) said that children were a precious asset incarnating hopes for a better world, where international solidarity would overcome all forms of exploitation and intolerance. For such hopes to become a reality, each and every State had to adopt measures to guarantee all human beings the conditions required for their physical and psychological development, namely a decent quality of life, a clean environment and education enabling children to participate actively in the social life of their community.

39. Admittedly adults, first and foremost those in a child's family, were vital to the educational process and his Government was prepared to join in a debate on ways of enhancing the crucial role of adults in that process. Such a discussion must give priority to children's interests in keeping with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other pertinent legal instruments.

40. For Member States of the United Nations, that Convention constituted the most important international standard-setting instrument in the field of children's rights, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child was the best forum for comparing experiences with a view to improving national legislation and making it more consonant with the Convention. In order to comply with the precepts of the Convention and its optional protocols, his Government had recently adopted a new law on the sexual exploitation of minors and had tabled a draft law designed to meet the growing demands on families with regard to bringing up and educating children. Several bills providing support for families and introducing leave for working parents had also been submitted to parliament in September.

41. His Government would soon be ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and was considering ratification of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Since the plight of children in wartime had always been a matter of great concern, his Government had voluntarily contributed to projects to protect children caught up in armed conflicts and had sponsored a programme to alert them to the dangers of landmines. The situation of girls deserved special attention, since they often were deprived of education and married at a very early age. Repeated pregnancies while they were still young endangered their health and they were frequently the victims of sexual violence with its inherent risk of disease.

42. From birth onwards, children in various parts of the world faced armed conflicts, disease, violence and poverty. It was for the United Nations to address those problems.

43. **Ms. Radhi** (Bahrain) said that her country had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in February 1992. In the context of efforts to ensure full implementation of the Convention in accordance with the advice received from the Committee on the Rights of the Child, her country was currently reviewing its legislation in order to ensure compliance with the provisions and principles of the Convention. That involved an open process of consultation with official bodies, the institutions of civil society and non-governmental organizations.

44. Her country's concern for children was reflected in the high level of its representation in the relevant international forums. For example, the delegation of her country at the twenty-seventh special session of the United Nations General Assembly on Children had been headed by the wife of the King of Bahrain who had drawn attention to the efforts being made by the Kingdom through its Constitution and legislation to ensure the physical and moral safety of children and to provide them with legal protection and social welfare. She had called on the international community to enact severe laws to prevent violations of the rights of children, particularly in armed conflict. Her country was studying a number of conventions concerning that subject.

45. Her country's National Commission on Childhood had been established in 1999 to focus governmental and non-governmental efforts. The Commission had recently made an analytical study of the status of children in Bahrain in conjunction with UNICEF and the American University in Cairo with a view to highlighting the services provided for children and identifying ways of providing the best possible protection for their rights. On the basis of the Commission's work, a three-year work plan had been drawn up for improving children's services and the Commission was also drawing up a national strategy relating to childhood.

46. Her country regarded education as one of the most important of the human development sectors in accordance with article 7 of the Constitution.

Education was provided free to all children between the ages of 6 and 17. Attention was also paid to nursery education in view of its importance for the personal, intellectual and affective development of children. The Ministry of Education was endeavouring to make nursery education an intrinsic part of education in State schools and had earmarked the necessary budget for that purpose with a view to improving the standard of living of low income families.

47. In order to extend the scope of education to include human rights in general and the rights of the child in particular, the National Council on Childhood had been working with the Ministry of Education and the British Council to incorporate matters relating to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in school curriculums.

48. In accordance with the provisions of article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the child's right to freedom of expression, efforts had been made to promote respect for the views of children and to encourage them to participate in all areas of concern to them through television programmes and various publications, whether intended specifically for children or for society as a whole. Children were also encouraged to participate in international forums concerned with the attainment and promotion of children's rights.

49. Her country was doing a great deal to provide a safe and wholesome environment for the development of children in which they could achieve their goals, a fact that was amply demonstrated by studies being undertaken with a view to enacting a law to protect the rights of mothers and children.

50. **Mr. Diarra** (Mali) said that his Government had devised policies and plans of action to promote the interests of women, children and the family, which would enhance the effects of existing sectoral programmes and the country's poverty reduction strategy. Mali had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the optional protocols thereto and other treaties on the subject. It was also party to International Labour Organization Conventions Nos. 182 and 138.

51. Its current national efforts focused on heightening awareness of children's rights, harmonizing national laws with international conventions, promoting activities to help children in special need of protection, preventing child mendicancy and combating transfrontier trafficking in children. The Penal Code and the Labour Code were likewise being revised with a view to giving children added protection. His country placed great hopes in its cooperation programme with UNICEF and in its fruitful partnership with other United Nations agencies, which had already led to improvements in national indicators of significance for the promotion and protection of mothers and children.

52. The sad spectacle of child soldiers showed how far the world still had to go in order to save future generations from the scourge of war. For that reason, a binding international instrument was needed in order to end the enrolment of children in armies and their use as instruments of war. The Human Security Network, which his country chaired, had made the issue of children in armed conflicts one of the priorities of its medium-term work plan for 2003-2005 and was intending to mount a campaign to increase awareness of the question. It was also seeking to promote the spread of standards guaranteeing the rights of children in armed conflicts and to encourage ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

53. A world fit for children could and should be built, a world free of poverty, war and AIDS, a world in keeping with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

54. **Ms. Clarke** (Barbados), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) countries, said that the tireless work of the United Nations to safeguard the human rights of children had made the Convention on the Rights of the Child one of the most powerful international instruments. While it was widely accepted that development could not be sustained if its future custodians were not nurtured and protected, children were often the persons most vulnerable to and affected by the obstacles to States' development. For that reason, the Millennium Development Goals placed great emphasis on ensuring the health, education and security of children.

55. While considerable progress had been made towards those goals, the many and various impediments to achieving the promise of the Millennium Declaration could be daunting. Although experts considered that the Millennium Development Goals were technically feasible and financially

affordable, the world was not on track to meet them in 2015. Despite the fact that the United Nations had set a target date for the reduction of poverty, millions of people were still struggling to overcome the daily grind of hunger, disease and extreme poverty. The international community should therefore give serious attention to narrowing disparities between nations.

56. There was no disputing the fact that the global targets required additional financial support and new approaches. States should therefore reaffirm their commitment to the Monterrey Consensus and the World Summit on Sustainable Development Plan of Implementation. In order to make those targets a reality action would have to be taken on all fronts. At national level, universal access to quality social services should be secured and all countries should strive to implement the 20/20 Initiative. Internationally, debt relief and honouring the undertakings given at Doha were essential. Countries should also take steps to fulfil the target of devoting 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to overseas development assistance.

57. Of the four priority areas identified in the booklet "A world fit for children", combating the spread of HIV/AIDS was of paramount importance to the Caribbean countries, which had the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS after sub-Saharan Africa. One of the most distressing aspects of the disease was mother-to-child transmission and that was why CARICOM had mounted educational programmes to fight the pandemic. Education was not only a fundamental right but an investment in the future, since education had proved to be a "vaccine" against the twin dangers of child labour and HIV/AIDS.

58. CARICOM States had a good record in the promotion and implementation of early childhood education, which was free and compulsory for boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 16. Nevertheless, rising pregnancy rates among teenagers had led several Caribbean States to create special programmes to reintegrate adolescent mothers into the education system in an effort to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty caused by teenage motherhood. An educated girl also had a better chance of protecting herself from exploitation and HIV/AIDS and had a positive impact on society in the long term.

59. As small island developing States, the CARICOM countries were vulnerable and their moderate development gains could easily be reversed. They therefore still needed the financial assistance and monitoring programmes that UNICEF had so ably provided in the past. For that reason, the region was worried by the possibility that the United Nations might downsize or close some of the UNICEF offices in the area, since that would create a void that could not be filled by other mechanisms.

60. **Ms. Al-Haj-Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the interests of children were accorded high priority by her country's Government, both in rural and in urban areas. A Higher Committee on Children had been in operation since 1999 to monitor implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the outcome of the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on Children in 2002.

61. Her country had acceded in 2002 to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts and to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and, in the previous year, to the International Labour Organization Convention No. 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment.

62. The previous summer, her Government had submitted its periodic report on the occasion of its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and would give careful consideration to the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

63. Her country was proud of what it had achieved in implementing the objectives of the World Summit for Children, particularly in respect of education and health care. In the latter respect, her country's health strategy relied mainly on expanding primary health care and extending it to the farthest reaches of the countryside as an expression of the principle of equality. Health care and compulsory education were available to all without charge in her country and 48 per cent of all children enrolled in education at the pre-university level were girls.

64. Following discussion of her country's periodic report, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in cooperation with the Government of Syria, had convened a seminar in Damascus in October 2003 to discuss all aspects of childhood and to highlight the achievements of the Government in that regard. Unfortunately, the Government was unable to extend the benefit of those

achievements to all Syrian children as thousands of them had been living under Israeli occupation since 1967 and suffered on a daily basis from the tyranny of the occupying Power which included the closure of educational establishments, the banning of Syrian syllabuses and books in schools and the imposition of Israeli syllabuses and Israeli citizenship in an attempt to erase the sense of national and regional identity of the rising generation. Thousands of families had been displaced and expropriated following the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan.

65. While commending the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on the report he had submitted (A/58/328), she regretted that he had not been able during the reporting period to visit occupied Palestine and to report on the oppression to which children there were subjected under the Israeli occupation. It was to be hoped that he would be able to make such a report to the Committee at a future session, particularly as the document issued in 1991, following the World Summit for Children, and the Final Document of the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on Children, held in 2002, had specifically mentioned the situation of children under foreign occupation.

66. It was important to address matters relating to childhood without being selective and without double standards. Much had been achieved during the past decade but much remained to be done and efforts should be redoubled to attain the objectives of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the targets of the World Summit for Children.

67. **Mr. Giorgio** (Eritrea) said he agreed that the situation of children in many parts of the world remained critical; the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols were significant international instruments that would help to advance the cause of children around the globe. The inclusion of a specific provision on disabled children in a new international convention on the rights of people with disabilities would likewise further buttress the existing legal protective framework for children.

68. His Government had taken all the legal and administrative steps needed to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It was also considering ratification of the two optional protocols and of International Labour Organization Conventions Nos. 138 and 182. In 2003 his country had submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Some of the measures highlighted in the report had included the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee on children's rights and the introduction of programmes to improve the delivery of basic social services at national, regional and local levels.

69. Coordination and cooperation among Government bodies and United Nations agencies, donor countries and non-governmental organizations were a key factor in addressing children's concerns and reducing infant mortality. In addition, his country's policy of helping war victims and orphans to reintegrate in the community through the extended family system and measures to assist young commercial sex workers, disabled children and the family had proved to be useful means of extending protection to vulnerable young people.

70. As the border conflict between his country and Ethiopia had affected thousands of children, his Government attached great importance to the issue of children affected by armed conflict. Post-conflict programmes should be strengthened and more resources devoted to alleviating the sufferings of children during and in the wake of strife, especially when their situation was worsened by a combination of war and drought.

71. International instruments and norms to improve the rights of children deserved the broadest possible support and the momentum they had created should be used to achieve further progress in that sphere.

72. **Mr. Laquerre** (Canada) welcomed the important initiatives under way to achieve the key goals of "A world fit for children", established at the twenty-seventh special session, the fact that many countries had put in place mechanisms to pursue the goals of the Declaration and Plan of Action and the coordinated manner in which the United Nations system was supporting that agenda.

73. Children, civil society and all levels of Government had been involved in the development of Canada's National Plan of Action for children. Canadians had been invited to contribute to the Plan through nationwide consultations aimed at incorporating regional perspectives, while independent focus groups had explored specific issues affecting children, and key stakeholders had been consulted. The Plan, reinforcing the country's commitment to children, would also address emerging issues relating to the

provisions of the Convention. Young people had been invited to express their views during preparation of the Plan, which was a multisectoral, long-term, child-centred framework for the decade to come and would be implemented by all Canadians, with regular reassessment of its priorities and strategies.

74. His country supported efforts to strengthen monitoring of, reporting on, and accountability for violations of children's rights in armed conflicts and encouraged close intersectoral coordination among all actors and with related initiatives. His delegation encouraged Member States that had not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, especially in the light of the work of United Nations agencies and NGOs in meeting the needs of war-affected children, often at great personal risk, in the interests of children's rights and adherence to international law. Canada encouraged the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to engage other relevant Special Rapporteurs, the treaty bodies and civil society. The United Nations system and NGOs must be at pains to prevent and address incidents of sexual abuse and exploitation of war-affected children, especially refugees and the internally displaced, and States must adopt the appropriate measures, including legislation and policies. He looked forward to the release of the assessment by the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations system's response to children and armed conflict, so as to ensure their sustained protection.

75. Canada hoped to ratify the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child pornography and child prostitution after the necessary domestic consultations, and called on all States to do likewise and to ratify or accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. He welcomed the recent entry into force of the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the imminent entry into force of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, since it was through collective action that the unimaginable suffering of trafficked children must be addressed. His delegation lauded the attempt by the Committee on the Rights of the Child to clear its backlog of reports, and supported its increased membership. Canada would continue to implement the Convention, a rights-based approach being the best way to address the challenges facing children the world over.

76. **Ms. Adjalova** (Azerbaijan) said that permanent and comprehensive childcare was one of her country's fundamental values. Among its achievements since the World Summit for Children were its accession to the major international instruments on child-rights protection; appropriate national legislation; reduction of epidemic diseases and eradication of poliomyelitis and measures on reproductive health and family planning. Azerbaijan had ratified the two Optional Protocols to the Convention and would shortly be submitting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child its combined second and third periodic reports prepared with UNICEF assistance.

77. The country celebrated International Child Protection Day, and the Government was conducting a number of programmes to solve the problems of minors, as well as a programme on improved education, child-rearing and rights protection, the National Plan of Action on implementation of the Convention, and the Plan of Action on women's issues, in which a separate section was devoted to the girl child. The country had actively participated in the special session on children, at which Azerbaijani children had been involved in the Children's Forum and had enjoyed an interactive dialogue with world leaders and senior United Nations personnel. On their return home, they had shared the experience in the major newspapers and on television. The country was committed to "A world fit for children", which highlighted the priorities of global policy on the protection of children's rights and had already taken specific measures to ensure its nationwide implementation.

78. The authorities involved all stakeholders in its special attention to the inculcation of a healthy lifestyle, limiting tobacco and alcohol consumption, combating HIV/AIDS and drugs and encouraging participation in sports, while reforming the social sector, especially public health. They also cooperated closely with UNICEF and with ILO in its action to combat child trafficking and child labour, and would shortly be submitting a translation of the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) to Parliament for ratification, as well as formulating concrete recommendations on national measures. The Government had recently adopted a national programme on homeless and street children to

encourage their return to school and would be setting up rehabilitation centres, with special training for teachers and medical and social workers.

79. Millions of children still suffered or died as a result of violence, exploitation and abuse during armed conflicts. Conflict and post-conflict areas were a hotbed of illegal activities, including the traffic in drugs and human beings, especially women and children. Armenia's military aggression and 15-year occupation of 20 per cent of Azerbaijani territory had made for thousands of internally displaced children and refugees and caused enormous financial and moral damage. Children had been killed, orphaned or disabled, taken hostage or had gone missing, while mined areas in the liberated territories posed a major threat. One way or another, severe spiritual wounds were inflicted on children, to the point where many teenagers had been born and reared in camps.

80. It was difficult for a country with an economy in transition to address the problem alone, in which connection she commended the UNICEF Office in Azerbaijan for its operational support and its constructive cooperation with the Government. The aforementioned ills could not be remedied by the sole adoption of instruments, but called for practical action and effective cooperation.

81. **Ms. Kusorgbor** (Ghana) said that the near-universal ratification of the Convention and the consequent review of many domestic legal systems were an encouraging signal from the comity of nations. The special session and its remarkable outcome document, "A world fit for children", demonstrated the strong political will to improve children's lot. However, since a variety of evils made for a critical situation of children — who were the future leaders — in many parts of the world, consistent policies were needed to uphold the principles enshrined in the Convention and implement the Plan of Action.

82. The increased membership of the Committee on the Rights of the Child was in the interest not only of equitable geographical distribution, but of the Committee's capacity to monitor implementation of the Convention; Ghana was currently finalizing its second periodic report to the Committee. Under its 1992-2003 Ten-Year National Programme of Action, it had undertaken various legal reforms to bring its child laws into line with the Convention and had conducted campaigns and programmes to educate the population in respect for children's rights, and another ten-year programme of action was being formulated. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, in collaboration with agencies in other sectors, integrated child-related policies and programmes into the national development agenda.

83. In keeping with the second Millennium Development Goal, in 1996 the Government had instituted free, compulsory universal basic education, significantly improving the school-attendance rate. The Girls' Education Unit had addressed the rising dropout rate among girls through strategies to increase their transition rate to senior secondary school, making for a gradual increase of their retention rate at the secondary and tertiary levels. The best investment for sustainable development was to ensure that children had a good start in life. The 1992 Constitution and 1998 Children's Act guaranteed all children the right to survival through the provision of adequate social services. Steps had been taken to improve primary health care, and there was 90 per cent immunization coverage against the six deadly childhood diseases; the country had thus been enabled to combat poliomyelitis, while the infant rate had been halved between 1990 and 2001. Youth most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS had been targeted for a national education programme, and efforts were under way to halt mother-to-child transmission.

84. The horrendous act of trafficking in children undermined their rights to survival, development, education, health and, above all, protection from exploitation, and was being jointly studied in the region by the UNICEF Regional Office and the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre. Field-driven, action-oriented research could lead to methodologies for filling gaps in knowledge and prove useful in the formulation of national and subregional policies. Children in armed conflicts were also of grave concern to Ghana, whose commitment to global efforts to find solutions was evidenced by its cooperation with other ECOWAS member States and its support for West Africa's implementation of the "Neighbourhood Initiative" proposed by the Special Rapporteur. While pledging Ghana's commitment to the Accra Declaration and Plan of Action on War-Affected Children and continuing its support for efforts to reinforce the new Child-Protection Unit of the ECOWAS secretariat, her delegation felt that potential perpetrators would be deterred only if the international community was more forceful in bringing to justice all

those who committed war crimes, particularly against children and women. Other global initiatives should also be taken to address factors leading to conflicts in order to avoid violations of children's rights.

85. Notwithstanding the African countries' belief in their responsibility to ensure the well-being of their children, they faced global challenges that impeded their mobilization of resources for improving their social and economic situation. For that reason, she called on the international community to support the African Governments' pursuit of the goals of "A world fit for children", essentially through the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

86. **Mr. Nteturuye** (Burundi) said that children's rights — the cornerstone of human rights — had long been the subject of individual and collective concern. His country had always worked on behalf of children's well-being and had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, while the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was currently before the National Assembly for approval.

87. The promotion of children's rights in a war-torn country posed an enormous challenge in that children were often coerced into fighting and were the first casualties. The destruction and looting of schools and hospitals deprived them of their basic rights to education and health, while rape and other acts of sexual violence exposed girls to many sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. The warring factions in Burundi had agreed to ban the enlistment of minors under 18, a decision set forth in the 2002 Tanzania Peace Accord and the Subsequent Ceasefire Agreement. The Government had likewise signed an agreement with UNICEF on the demobilization of child soldiers, while a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme had been launched in 2001. The Government was creating a database on administrative agencies and the army, while formulating a standard procedure for the treatment of child captives. The National Committee for the Demobilization of Child Soldiers, officially launched in October, consisted of five ministers and representatives of NGOs, United Nations agencies and former child soldiers, and would be assisted by focal points to be identified by the Government.

88. The October 2003 signing of the Pretoria Protocol on Political, Defence and Security Power-sharing between the Transitional Government and the National Council for the Defence of Democracy/Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) augured well for the project, which, however, could succeed only when the last armed rebel group, the Forces for National Liberation (Palipehutu FNL), called a halt to the war and joined the peace process. That group was notorious for its use of child soldiers in the front line, as evidenced by the terrible images of the July attack on the capital, Bujumbura. As part of the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Programme, the country sincerely hoped for a section focusing on children's issues, with particular attention to education, basic health care, nutrition, rehabilitation of child soldiers and girls' special needs. His Government intended to abide by the spirit and letter of the Convention in order to promote the rights of Burundian children.

89. **Mr. Koubaa** (Tunisia) said that, while "A world fit for children" had made a giant leap towards the full realization of children's rights and the principles enshrined in the Convention and its Optional Protocols, there was room for more efforts to make its commitments a reality. The situation of children was still precarious, especially in Africa, owing to armed conflicts involving children, the ravages caused by epidemics such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, malnutrition and the exploitation of children. All stakeholders must redouble their efforts and coordinate their action in the interest of sustainable development. It was necessary to reinforce the legal framework concerning children in armed conflict and encourage States to sign, ratify and implement effectively the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Belligerents must abide by international humanitarian law and meet their commitments regarding the protection of children. That entailed strengthening United Nations agencies on the ground and providing them with the resources for effective action on behalf of children.

90. Mindful of the best interests of the child, Tunisia had formulated a national strategy and adopted a plan of action, and had established a Higher Children's Council to define a coherent strategy for promoting children and assessing their needs. It had also adopted a Child Protection Code and set up mechanisms for its implementation and follow-up. The Observatory for information, documentation training and studies on the protection of children's rights monitored the status of

children and gathered national and international data, and also assisted in the formulation of policies and programmes for promoting their rights, protection and growth. In addition, the first session of the Children's Parliament had considered the main lines of the National Plan of Action for Children (2002-2010), while the subsequent special session had been devoted to the Environmental Education Programme.

91. The Children's Ombudsperson appointed to the Ministry of Women's, Family and Child Affairs took preventive action on behalf of children whose physical and moral integrity was threatened. Child Protection Month, focusing on the educator's preventive role, commemorated the ratification of the Convention. In that connection, the purpose of the high-level Arab congress on the promotion and protection of children's rights, to be held in Tunis in January 2004, was to formulate an Arab strategy for children that would serve as a model for the elaboration of national action plans. NGOs were encouraged to participate. The Tunisian Association for the Rights of the Child had helped organize an African symposium in Burkina Faso on "Children's Rights and Social Exclusion", attended by 150 delegates from 22 African countries, who had assessed progress and obstacles and outlined new child-rights protection strategies.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.